

Activating the U.S. Movement

By Eric Booth, independent advisor to the El Sistema movement, Publisher of *The Ensemble*

There are three basic ways to organize social change: a) a *centralized model*, with a national entity leading local organizations and like-minded people); b) a *network approach*, where participating groups and individuals lead-and-follow together); and c) just *"let a thousand flowers bloom,"* with no central organizing as the separate entities respectfully go it alone. The El Sistema-inspired movement in the U.S. has grown up beautifully as a "thousand flowers," with good collaborations and much mutual help. It is now time for us to grow into an activated network in which many hands join to swiftly accomplish big things together that we can't do alone.

That was the conclusion of a group of 13 U.S. colleagues who came together for two days last month in Cambridge, Mass. to consider ways the U.S. movement can more effectively work together. The meeting was suggested by the leaders of Fundamusical in Venezuela, who asked the [National Alliance of El Sistema-Inspired Programs](#) (NAESIP, founded in 2013, to advance the national movement) to assemble a small group of individuals who have been working on nationally-focused projects. The goal was to align the many initiatives, to coordinate, to move the movement forward. Three Venezuelan colleagues joined the convening: Eduardo Mendez, Executive Director of Fundamusical; Bolivia Bottome, Director of Institutional Development and International Relations of Fundamusical; and Patricia Díaz, Assistant to Mr. Mendez. All the notes from the meeting are available at <http://goo.gl/xhkM90>, thanks to the dynamic facilitator Bill Nigreen. All participants knew that this group was only a catalyst for an inclusive, field-wide conversation to come – please read and use the sidebar to the right to join the discussions.

The breakthrough statement came from Eduardo Mendez, urging us to stop focusing so much on organizational issues, and look toward what matters most – young people making music together. With that motivation, it will be much easier to work together most efficiently and effectively.

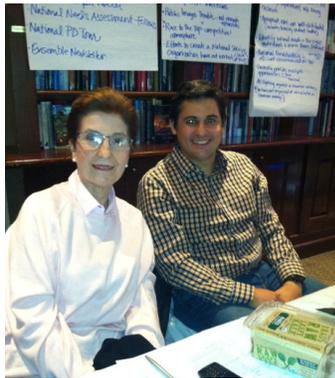
Eduardo's reminder sparked a spray of ideas for national priorities that would flourish if the field were activated to join. Two ideas rang out to me; they have surfaced before, but now take on revitalized intention: 1) To set our sights on launching a National El Sistema Youth Orchestra, and 2) to develop a supporting communications infrastructure, with an efficient, effective website/web portal to all things Sistema that makes it easy for everyone to learn what's going on and join in to help the movement (and national projects) flourish. A way forward is clear: focus on projects that have the greatest impact, and develop ways to foster inclusiveness in balance with efficiency ("we need to get stuff done").

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Here I speak personally, as an observer of the field and not as a reporter of the Cambridge event. I have long said that the weakness of our national movement is more a problem of engagement than organization. For many reasons, all understandable, we have not developed the habits of an activated network that a true movement requires. We have focused intensely on our local programs, and our "thousand flowers" are blooming well. But movements require commitment to a greater whole if they are going to effect change – think of the successful movements of recent U.S. history: civil rights, women's rights, gay rights. We too are a social justice movement and must balance our commitment to local successes with a passion for achieving change together.

For example, this summer Joe Hamm initiated a simple plan for every site to fill out a [questionnaire](#) that would provide our first authoritative data on the U.S. movement, who and where we are. After months of his volunteer work, supported by NAESIP, fewer than half of U.S. sites have filled out the questionnaire. We can do better than this. We have to do better than this.

I believe the Cambridge conversation can yield a turning point. Many of us are currently taking actions that contribute to the greater whole, and if we connect more effectively, and activate participation,



Bolivia Bottome and Eduardo Mendez during the Cambridge meeting.

AFTER THE FORUM

Shared Action

Contribute to the initiative Joe Hamm launched (with the support of NAESIP) to collect baseline information on our whole U.S. movement. Make sure your program is included. <http://goo.gl/5HKW4T>

Shared Communication

Learn more about the National Forum held in Cambridge, MA in September 2013 and provide feedback about the topics discussed. <http://goo.gl/xhkM90>. You can login and provide feedback through your NAESIP Ning account or via Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, or Yahoo!

The National Alliance will host three conference calls to discuss the National Forum, receive feedback and answer questions. Conference calls will take place on October 3, 8, and 10 from 12pm-1pm EST. Conference dial-in number: (760) 569-0111 Participant Access Code: 121767#. Each call will be recorded and posted as a podcast through the NAESIP website.

we change the understanding of what it means to be a part of this movement. It would mean that through all our busy-ness, we all find the time and energy to respond willingly to opportunities in support of our network. This means that every part-time teacher and staff member is a crucial member of this movement, and we need the energy and ideas of all. I can imagine each of us wearing a button that says "5%" – stating the commitment of everyone in the movement to dedicate 5% of her or his work time to projects that advance the national movement. We can make sure you have a handy list of ways to contribute your few hours per month. If we had this eager whole-movement capacity ready to pour into projects, we could become the movement that we and our Venezuelan heroes know we can be. Program leaders, can you change your expectations of everyone's work to include time for the nation? Can we afford not to?

As enhanced national leadership arises, please respond to requests to join projects. When you speak to people about your local program, share its context as part of the national movement – we advance together or struggle alone. And if you don't know how to talk about the national movement, then let's complete [Joe Hamm's survey](#), so we can have baseline data to start shaping our national story.

"It is not enough for young musicians to love their instruments. They must learn to love their responsibilities as citizens. They need to become apostles to the community." – José Antonio Abreu

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. & CANADIAN EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

News Notes

After over a year of planning, **Oregon BRAVO Youth Orchestras** brings El Sistema to Oregon, launching operations on September 23 at Rosa Parks School, one of Portland's priority schools, with 18 languages spoken and 95% of students in poverty. **BRAVO Rosa Parks** serves almost two hundred children with two program components: the school day program provides a half hour of Suzuki violin instruction twice a week to all students in K-1 (about 150 participants); the afterschool string orchestra and chorus includes 40 students in 2nd and 3rd grade and meets for two hours a day, five days a week. BRAVO is grateful for a national network of direct support and generous assistance, including Sistema Fellows, other NAESIP programs, and a quickly growing community of local champions, partners, and funders. www.oregonbravo.org



New BRAVO student Marcus Jones proudly displays his paper violin.
Photo: Kimberly Warner

On August 19th, the Central Kentucky Youth Orchestras invited 24 second and third graders into it's newest orchestra, **North Limestone MusicWorks**. Led by Sistema Fellow Rachel Hockenberry, NoLi MusicWorks is the first El Sistema-inspired program in Kentucky. The program meets every weekday from 2:45PM - 5:00PM, following the academic calendar. Students receive intensive instruction on violin, viola and cello. Instruments are provided for student use, and the program operates at no cost to participants. In its first year, all of MusicWorks' students attend Arlington Elementary school, a Title 1 school in Lexington's Northside district. The program is housed at Embrace Church, which is located directly across the street from Arlington Elementary.

The MD's Honors College at the University of MD Baltimore County, partnering with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, has launched its **Music Entrepreneurship Certificate Program**. The inaugural year has students immersed in hands-on training in community building through music. For more information: <http://www.umbc.edu/music/programs/entrepreneurship.php>

Resources

For those interested in musical arrangements, Chris Schroeder, Resident Artist at Conservatory Lab Charter School, has arranged and orchestrated a body of works for youth wind ensembles and orchestras. His arrangements are in the same key and stay true to the musical form of the original composition, giving ensemble leaders and/or students the opportunity to listen to almost any recording and play along and even sing along. He has also adjusted the note range of the wind parts to better suit young beginners. To learn more and see a selection of Bach Chorales from St. Matthew's Passion, email him directly at: info@christopher-schroeder.com.

Two new studies from The Wallace Foundation:

- The National Center on Time & Learning and The Wallace Foundation have released **Advancing Arts Education through an Expanded School Day: Lessons from Five Schools** – about schools using longer student and teacher days to prioritize time for arts education which improves student achievement. <http://www.timeandlearning.org/artsreport>

- **New Opportunities for Interest-Driven Arts Learning in a Digital Age** by Kylie Peppler finds young people follow their artistic passions outside of school and also in traditional programs with new technologies that enable them to create and share art. The research identifies challenges and offers suggestions for future research, practice, and policy to enable more youth, particularly disadvantaged youth, to participate in the arts. <http://tinyurl.com/WallaceStudy>

Check out this delightful idea on YouTube by the musicians of Carnegie Hall's *Ensemble ACJW* – can't you picture our young orchestras doing this in town squares everywhere? A faculty ensemble at iCAN in Santa Barbara *will* do that in early October! <http://improveverywhere.com/2013/09/24/conduct-us/>

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FROM THE EDITOR

Two days after El Sistema leaders from Venezuela met in Cambridge, Mass. with a group of U.S. colleagues involved in national Sistema-related work, a dozen or so local arts and social services leaders attended a series of presentations and workshops at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. The stated purpose of the Cambridge meeting was "building a framework to support the permanence and strengthening" of the U.S. El Sistema movement. In Illinois, ambitions were less lofty: attendees came to find out what, exactly, El Sistema is, and what it could possibly have to do with Peoria.

I was visiting Bradley to provide information and, if possible, inspiration; but as it turned out, I received at least as much inspiration from the citizens of Peoria as they did from me. The more they learned about El Sistema, the more excited they became. Faculty members and students from the university's music department showed up at session after session to ask how they might become involved. The conductor of the local symphony posted an enthusiastic message on his Facebook page. The director of the local youth symphony began to brainstorm about possible locations for a Peoria núcleo. The head of a social services center was brimming with ideas. "I've heard something really important for my organization today," he said. I felt fortunate to be reminded of how electrifying it can be to hear about El Sistema for the first time.

For those of us with years of Sistema-related experience, and especially those involved with the complex issue of how best to mobilize projects at a national level, the electric thrill of first encountering El Sistema can sometimes be difficult to access. But it's important to stay connected to that galvanizing moment in our own lives – the moment when our deepest convictions about the potency of music were validated, with a vividness and on a scale we had never dreamed possible. We all experienced that moment; it's what has brought us together as an authentic movement, and what still unites us. We'll be able to create an effective national network only if we can sustain and refresh the sense of wondrous possibility that first fired our imaginations. In that regard, we need simply notice just how powerfully, how compellingly, El Sistema played in Peoria last week.

Tricia Tunstall

"Your vocation, your life work, is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. – Frederick Buechner, U.S. writer and theologian